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CIA/OSR /MEMO RA 750916 US ARMS INVENTORY IN VIETNAM SEP 75

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CIA/OSR

MEMO RA 750916

September 16, 1975

MEMORANDUM

SUBJECT : US Arms Inventory in Vietnam

1. In their sudden victory over South Vietnam last spring, Hanoi's forces captured large amounts of US-made military equipment, ranging from small arms to modern attack aircraft--in fact, every type of equipment the US had provided the South Vietnamese forces during the war. Much of this hardware is intact and operable, and there are large quantities of munitions for the weapons.

2. As a consequence, the communists have a problem deciding what equipment to integrate into their own forces to strengthen existing capabilities and to provide new capabilities, and also what to do with any surplus hardware. One of the options open to Hanoi is that of providing arms to insurgents--a possibility that is causing considerable concern in several nearby countries, notably Thailand and Malaysia. Thai insurgents in the northeast, for example, have received aid from Hanoi in the past, and the North Vietnamese could increase that support now that they have more than sufficient stocks.

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3. Hanoi could earn hard currency by selling the US equipment on the world market. The communists face major economic development costs in both North and South Vietnam and need foreign exchange for this. Hanoi claims that the equipment is worth about \$5 billion; this appears reasonable. The windfall profits the communists could realize from the sale of a substantial part of this US hardware would be considerable and would obviously ease the financial burden of development.

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This memorandum was prepared in the Office of Strategic Research. Comments and queries may be addressed to [redacted] extension 4051.

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A number of countries in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa reportedly are interested in obtaining the US equipment. There is, however, still no indication that Hanoi has decided to sell.

Aircraft:

4. US-made aircraft constitute the most valuable items of captured military hardware. The communists seized some 1,100 aircraft, including 75 F-5 and 113 A-37 fighter-bombers, and the North Vietnamese apparently are integrating some of these into their forces. [REDACTED]

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[REDACTED] the North Vietnamese have organized the F-5 and A-37 aircraft, along with MIG fighters from the North, into an air division in the Saigon area. The US-made fighter-bombers give the North Vietnamese a significant ground attack capability for the first time. Until now, the North Vietnamese air force had a clearly defensive orientation.

5. There is shortage of some spare parts for the US aircraft, but the problem does not seem to be insurmountable over the near term. The communists can cannibalize other aircraft and may be able to find a source of replacement parts on the international market. There are enough US-trained South Vietnamese maintenance personnel available to repair and keep the aircraft operational if spare parts can be obtained.

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6. In addition to the fighter-bombers, the communists seized large numbers of helicopters. Among these were about three dozen large transport helicopters, and [REDACTED]

[REDACTED] the North Vietnamese are now flying some of them in the Saigon area. Moreover, as many as 400 smaller combat-support helicopters, including gunships, fell into communists hands. These helicopters have seen little flying since April, but the North Vietnamese appreciate their mobility and firepower and probably will keep some for their own forces; many, however, could still be available for sale.

7. The communists also captured approximately 50 transports, including C-119s and C-130s. These aircraft enhance their transportation capabilities, and for this reason some of them probably will be retained. Moreover,

the ground support equipment at the bases is adequate to support US-made aircraft. Some of this captured sophisticated electronic gear may well be passed along to the Soviets and the Chinese.

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Naval Craft

8. With the take-over, the communists came into possession of some 400 naval craft and approximately the same number of transport vessels.

9. The naval craft are mostly coastal and river patrol boats, along with a few deepwater ships. While these craft provide the communists with an improved patrol capability, they do not appear necessary and may well become available for export.

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[REDACTED] the North Vietnamese have already used some of the freighters to ferry cargo between large coastal cities in the South. The communists likely to retain most of these vessels for their own use.

Ground Forces Weapons

10. The bulk of the US equipment captured in the South consists of ground forces weapons and munitions. The inventory contains over 500 tanks, approximately 1,200 armored personnel carriers, about 45,000 trucks and jeeps, some 1,300 pieces of artillery, nearly 1 million M-16 rifles and other small arms, and thousands of mortars, antitank weapons, grenade launchers, and machine guns. In addition, there are large stocks of munitions for all of the weapons.

11. Much of this equipment appears to be surplus to communists requirements. The North Vietnamese army is already well equipped with Soviet and Chinese hardware, and their stockpiles declined little as a result of the spring fighting.

12. Moreover, the North Vietnamese have been attempting to standardize their weapons throughout the regular forces, and they probably would be reluctant to change unless they

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gained a significant improvement in the process). In most cases, changing to US weapons would provide little if any improvement. The communist AK-47 infantry rifle, for example, is considered an effective weapon.

13. A number of prospective purchasers are waiting for Hanoi to open the doors for business, but Hanoi apparently is in no hurry to sell.

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[REDACTED] this suggests that Hanoi may be stockpiling weapons in preparation for selling them. Since most of the US equipment is readily marketable, it seems likely that Hanoi will eventually dispose most of the armor and other ground forces equipment.

15. Serious questions of economic advantage, political impact, and international reputation must, however, be decided before Hanoi begins disposing of its captured arms stockpile.

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